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Labor Day Time to Reflect on Success of Employment Programs

For most people, Labor Day is a temporary reprieve from usual workday activities. But for the 7 percent of the state's population that are unemployed it's another in a string of Mondays without work.

Fortunately, career resources are more accessible than ever to job seekers and businesses. The state began improving its employment programs before the economic slump, changes that have helped it successfully meet the challenge of providing services during a year when Washington's unemployment rate has lingered among the nation's worst.

And despite the tenuous state of Washington's job market, some companies are hiring. Job sectors that continue to see growth include health care, which is expected to add 850 registered nurses, and education, where 452 new positions for elementary teachers are projected. Financial services and local government jobs are also on the rise.

"We remain optimistic that the state's economy is on the brink of gradual recovery, and take comfort in knowing that for many workers this will be a Labor Day to celebrate their personal successes," said Employment Security Department Commissioner Sylvia P. Mundy.

The loss of jobs in the past year has impacted state employment programs.

Employment Security paid out \$1.3 billion in unemployment benefits from January to July, compared to \$510 million during the same period in 2000 when the state's unemployment rate was 4.4 percent. Much of that difference can be attributed to two government programs that went into effect earlier this year. The programs allow the department to extend unemployment benefits for some individuals who have used up their 30 weeks of regular benefits, up to a maximum of 65 weeks and \$32,240.

"Employment Security has worked diligently to provide the financial assistance, skills training and support services families and businesses need to survive the recession," Mundy said. "We've hired more staff to keep up with the pace of layoffs, extended hours at our unemployment claims telecenters, organized job fairs and informational workshops, and collaborated with our partners on strategies to ensure we reach those who need our help."

The department and its partners at the state's WorkSource career centers helped more than 232,000 laid-off workers, welfare recipients, veterans, disabled adults and others find work between July 2001 and June 2002.

WorkSource partners enrolled more than 9,000 workers into training, providing a means for individuals to upgrade their skills, find new jobs, enhance their wages and remain competitive in their fields. Workers who lost jobs when an industry changed or their skills became outdated were able to retrieve 80 to 93 percent of their previous wages after training.

Employment Security is also a key provider of services for WorkFirst, the state's welfare-to-work program, which helps parents develop the skills needed to find jobs, support their families and become self-sufficient. Since 1997, WorkFirst has helped 138,000 parents leave welfare and stay off. Today, less than 2.5 percent of Washington's population receives welfare benefits – the lowest level since 1969.

Employment Security has worked hard to ensure people are aware of new services, such as the ability to apply for unemployment benefits online at <http://go2ui.com> and the creation of state-of-the-art WorkSource centers that provide all the resources job seekers and employers need in one place.

WorkSource also manages a Web site at <http://go2worksource.com> where job seekers can search more than 14,000 job listings, get information on career events in their communities and post resumes that can be viewed by employers. The site was visited 1.7 million times during the last year.

“Since the first Labor Day was celebrated in the late 1800’s, families have come to associate the holiday with picnics, weekend getaways and other relaxing activities. This year, perhaps more so than others, it seems fitting to reflect on Labor Day’s roots as a tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength of our communities and nation, and to consider the importance of employment programs that help those in need,” Mundy said.

Career Resources:

- ❑ **WorkSource:** <http://go2worksource.com>
One-stop career resource centers for job seekers and employers. Web site provides resources for job seekers and businesses, including a searchable database of job listings. For the location nearest you, call toll-free 1-877-872-JOBS or visit the Web site.
- ❑ **Unemployment Insurance:** <http://go2ui.com>
Apply for benefits online 24 hours a day or by phone from 6 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday-Friday except state holidays. Waits are shortest during early mornings, late evenings and mid-week.
Seattle: (206) 766-6000
Tacoma: (253) 396-3500
Spokane: (509) 893-7000
All other areas: 1-800-362-4636
TDD: 1-800-365-8969
Spanish: 1-800-360-2271
- ❑ **WorkFirst:** <http://www.wa.gov/workfirst>
Washington’s welfare-to-work strategy offers services to help low-income parents find jobs, learn skills and become self-sufficient. Businesses receive incentives for hiring participants. Employers can call toll-free 1-888-734-WORK for information about hiring WorkFirst participants.
- ❑ **Employment Security Department Boeing Project Website:** <http://www.wa.gov/esd/boeing>
Provides information geared specifically toward laid-off Boeing workers.
- ❑ **Reaching Out:** <http://www.reachingout-washington.com>
Provides information about retraining, education and jobs for laid-off Boeing employees in Washington. The site is provided by the partners of the Boeing Labor Management Committee.
- ❑ **Employment Security’s Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch:** <http://www.wa.gov/esd/lmea>
The source for current, historical, and projected labor market data for the state, regions, and counties as well as reports and studies on the labor market issues of importance to Washington.
- ❑ **WorkFirst Post-Employment Labor Exchange (WPLEX)** call center. Trained staff contact working and former WorkFirst participants statewide to make sure they have access to programs that can help them stay employed, gain additional skills, get a better job and become financially self-reliant. WPLEX operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays. Clients seeking assistance can call the center at 1-877-WORK1st (967-5178). Translation services are available.

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